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LYON, FRANCE
BARBIE

The Central Intelligence Agency has asked France for permission to interrogate accused Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie in his Lyon prison cell, French legal officials said Thursday.

The U.S. Justice Department announced March 15 it had opened an investigation as to whether the Gestapo chief in wartime Lyon worked for U.S. intelligence agents in Germany after World II and whether the Americans helped him to flee Europe to Bolivia in 1951.

The allegations have been made by Nazi hunter Beate Klarsfeld and her husband Serge who tracked down Barbie in his Bolivian refuge.

In New York, the magazine Family Weekly reported in its June 12 edition that Barbie worked for the CIA while living in Bolivia. Reporter Ernest Volkman said Barbie was "reporting regularly to the CIA in La Paz."

Volkman quoted an unnamed former CIA official who said Barbie was recruited by the intelligence agency because he was a close friend and security advisor to Hugh Banzer, who led a military coup in 1971 and seized control of Bolivia's government.

He said, however, that he did not know whether Barbie was actually on the CIA payroll at the time, but said Barbie had become rich through his drug connections and "didn't need the money."

The magazine also said Barbie was the mastermind of Bolivia's cocaine traffic to the United States in the 1970s and became a colonel in the Bolivian secret police and recruited 6,000 mercenaries into a paramilitary force to protect Bolivian drug traffic operations.

Lyon legal officials speculated the CIA would be interested in Barbie's connections in Bolivia with arms sales and drug traffic as well as in his postwar past.

The officials said the justice ministry in Paris told the CIA the interview could take place on two conditions.

Only 30 questions could be asked and they would have to be submitted to Investigating Judge Christian Riss who is gathering evidence from witnesses to determine if Barbie can be tried on a charge of "crimes against humanity." Barbie already has been tried in absentia for war crimes.

The second condition was that a French official fluent in English must be present during the interrogation and that he can intervene at any time he believes the interrogation is straying from the agreed upon questions.

The legal officials said these two conditions ironically are the same as those demanded by the Americans in 1947 when the French government asked to interrogate Barbie about his activities in Lyon during World War II.

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At the time Barbie was installed in a U.S. intelligence office in Kempten near Augsburg, Germany, and was working for the Americans, the officials said.

The French government accepted the conditions and Barbie was interviewed by a French military official in the presence of U.S. military officials who understood French, the legal sources said.

The sources said the U.S. justice department has not yet replied to the French conditions.